

Safe Urban Gardening

Many people are enjoying the satisfaction and health benefits of growing their own produce. However, some properties may have environmental contamination. Fortunately, the risks can be significantly reduced or eliminated by employing some simple best practices.

Here is an overview of the best practices. See the references for more details. Contact us, if you have any questions.

1. Be aware of the issue.

- Learn the current and previous uses of the property and nearby properties.
 - Interview neighbors and former occupants.
 - Review Sanborn Insurance Maps and other historical documents.
 - Check federal and state environmental databases.
 - Do a visual site inspection.
- Based on the history of the property, consider sampling the soil. (Note that the usual soil testing is for nutrients, not contaminants. See the references for directions on how to sample for contaminants.)
- To be extra cautious or if the property's history raises special concerns, have an environmental professional conduct an Environmental Site Assessment. (An Environmental Site Assessment can also provide some environmental liability protection, if done prior to acquiring the property.)
 - The Kentucky Brownfield Redevelopment Program provides a limited number of free assessments (including soil testing for contaminants) for nonprofits and local governments. <http://dca.ky.gov/brownfields/Pages/tba.aspx>
 - If you want to hire a consultant, check the Consultant's Directory managed by the Kentucky Pollution Prevention Center. <https://louisville.edu/kppc/es/consultants-directory> (Please note the disclaimer regarding the directory.)

2. Avoid the most contaminated areas or take extra steps to address.

- Plant away from footprint of older buildings (lead-based paint) and away from heavily travelled roads.
- Cover pathways with mulch, stones or bricks.
- Amend soils – add organic material, keep the pH near neutral.
- If adding topsoil or fill, make sure it is from an uncontaminated source.
- Plant mostly produce that is less likely to absorb contaminants.

Most Suitable	Vegetable Fruits and Seeds	Trees	
	tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, okra (seed pods only), squash, corn, cucumber, melons, peas, beans (shelled), onions (bulbs only)	apples, pears	
Least Suitable	Green Leafy Vegetables	Other Vegetables	Root Crops
	lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, beet leaves, cabbage, kale, collards	broccoli, cauliflower, green beans, snow peas	carrots, potatoes, turnips

- For more serious contamination:
 - Remediate the contamination or
 - Use raised-bed or container gardening.

3. Follow some basic practices to reduce the exposure.

- Wear gloves and wash hands after gardening.
- Don't track dirt into the house.
- Clean all produce.
- Peel root crops.
- Remove outer leaves of leafy vegetables.

4. Enjoy the bounty of the land!

Safe Urban Gardening References

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Urban Agriculture website:

<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/urbanag>

"How Does Your Garden Grow? Brownfields Redevelopment and Local Agriculture"

http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/success/local_ag.pdf

"Brownfields and Urban Agriculture: Interim Guidelines for Safe Gardening Practices"

http://epa.gov/brownfields/urbanag/pdf/bf_urban_ag.pdf

University of Louisville, Kentucky Environmental Finance Center

"Redefining Brownfields: Safe Urban Gardening"

<http://cepm.louisville.edu/>

"Urban Agriculture and Soil Contamination: An Introduction to Urban Gardening, Practice Guide #25"

http://cepm.louisville.edu/Pubs_WPapers/practiceguides/PG25.pdf

"Establishing Urban Agriculture in Your Community: What You Need to Know Before You Get Your Hands Dirty, Practice Guide #27"

http://cepm.louisville.edu/Pubs_WPapers/practiceguides/PG27.pdf

"Safe Container Gardening, Practice Guide #28"

http://cepm.louisville.edu/Pubs_WPapers/practiceguides/PG28.pdf

Kentucky Brownfield Redevelopment Program

Kentucky Brownfield Redevelopment Program homepage:

<http://dca.ky.gov/brownfields>

Free Assessment Program for Local Governments and Nonprofits
<http://dca.ky.gov/brownfields/Pages/tba.aspx>

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